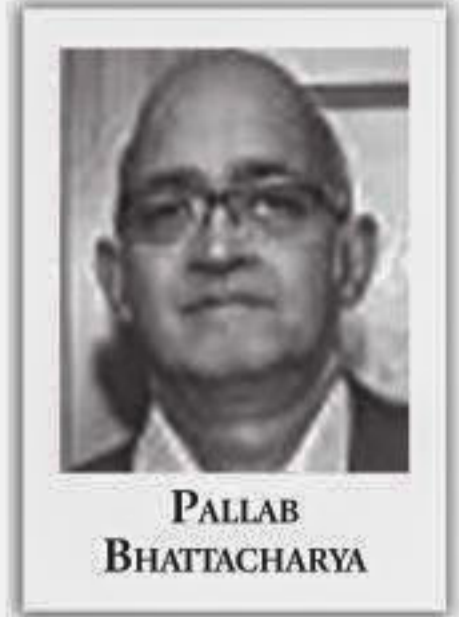


# Assam's NRC data conundrum



PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

**A**FTER the Indian Supreme Court recently rejected the Indian central and Assamese governments' plea for sample re-verification of names included in the National Register of Citizens (NRC), politics has begun playing out afresh over the issue. On August 1, the Bharatiya Janata Party government in Assam released, in the legislative assembly, data related to inclusion and exclusion of names in 33 districts of Assam in the draft final NRC, which was released in July, 2018, and called into question the fairness of the exercise of updating the NRC.

Making public the data, Assam's Parliamentary

Affairs Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary argued that there is a higher inclusion of names in districts associated with immigration and lower in other districts. It cited the statistics to make out a case for a review of the 20 percent of NRC names in Assamese districts bordering Bangladesh and ten percent in the remaining areas. The final draft NRC, published in July last year, contained the names of 2.89 crore out of the 3.29 crore applicants and kept out about 40 lakh people. In June this year, another one lakh people were excluded from the NRC as part of a check and verification exercise conducted by the NRC Coordinator.

The data tabled in the state legislature is all about demographic profile in different parts of Assam to show 12.15 percent of the applicants' names were excluded from the final draft published in July last year. The figures of exclusion

in the districts sharing border with Bangladesh are: 7.22 percent in South Salmara, 8.26 percent in Dhubri, and 7.67 percent in Karimganj. These three districts are Muslim-majority. However, the figure of exclusion is higher in dominant indigenous population districts: 14.31 percent in Karbi Anglong and 13.25 percent in Tinsukia in upper Assam. In Guwahati city, far from the border, nearly 18 percent of the names are not included in the NRC.

The Assam government's plea for 20 percent re-verification of the inclusion rates in districts bordering Bangladesh is based on the assessment that these areas are bound to have a high percentage of illegal immigrants. But there is another interesting picture that emerges from the data: higher exclusion percentages have been recorded in Muslim-majority districts (not border districts) like Morigaon (52.56 percent Muslims as per the census of 2011), Barpeta (70.74 percent Muslims as per the 2011 census) and Nagaon (55.36 percent Muslims according to the same census). The rate of exclusion in Morigaon is 15.04 percent, in Barpeta 13.4 percent, and in Nagaon 14.12 percent, according to the data.

By questioning the fairness of the process of updating the NRC and attacking NRC Coordinator Prateek Hajela, the Assam government may have placed itself in a bind because the Supreme Court has rejected the plea for re-verification and given the go-ahead for publication of the final NRC on August 31 this year. During the debate on the NRC data, several legislators of the BJP criticised the updating process and brought allegations of bribery and other irregularities like family legacy document manipulation for inclusion of names in the document. The broad message sent out by the legislators' speeches is that the NRC updating exercise is flawed.

Initiating the discussion, BJP lawmaker Debananda Hazarika said "a fair NRC will mean Magna Carta but if it is full of error, it will threaten the integrity and sovereignty of the country." Another BJP lawmaker Shiladitya Dev contended that the NRC exercise has become a one-man exercise of Prateek Hajela and that it is going to be a "defective" list of Indian citizens. Topping it all, Patowary alleged that there had been a large-scale misuse of legacy data in districts bordering Bangladesh and therefore the percentage of non-inclusion of names in the NRC there is less. On the other hand, senior Congress leader and former Assam Chief Minister Tarun

Gogoi alleged the current state government was not serious about completing the NRC.

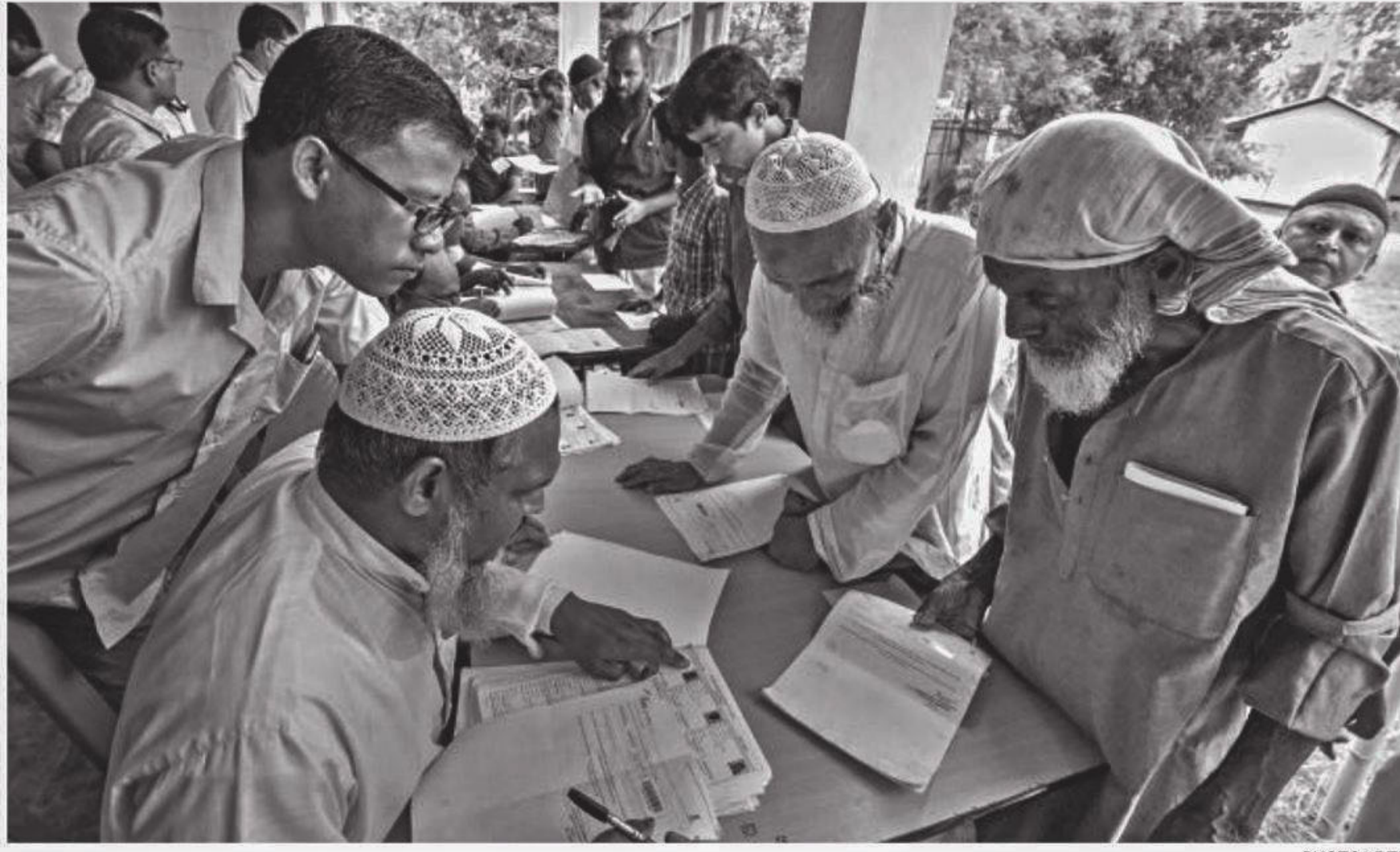
What complicated things further is the sudden flurry of notices issued to thousands of people in Assam in the first week of August to appear for hearings in connection with the NRC within a shortened deadline, even though the Supreme Court had mandated in its April 10 order that at least 15 days' notice in advance be given for this. There was no clarity as to how many such notices were sent across Assam. Many people who got these notices claimed they had earlier attended such hearings when claims to inclusion of names and objections to inclusions were being heard.

The history of human civilisation is often a history of migration. But in the case of Assam, academics have over the decades remained divided over what contributed to the growth of Muslim population in Assam. Nandita Saikia, Assistant Professor of Population Studies in Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, in comments made to *The Indian Express* newspaper, was not inclined to attribute this growth to natural causes and explained this in terms of immigration.

Abdul Mannan, former Professor of Statistics in Gauhati University, discussed in his book "Infiltration: The Genesis of Assam Movement" the rise of the Muslim population in the state and concluded that this had been fuelled by natural factors rather than planned migration, because an overwhelming majority of the Muslims are poor and illiterate. While Saikia said the NRC data was not scientifically collected; Mannan, in remarks carried by *The Indian Express*, described the Assam government's interpretation of the NRC data as "sheer propaganda not supported by statistics."

The huge uncertainty looming over those who will be left out of the NRC will pose an enormous humanitarian problem. What will be the contours of the approach to solve the issue that has roiled Assam for decades? Should it be looked at from a purely legalistic point of view or from a polarising narrative? Any solution will have to take into account that any migration—legal or illegal—is mostly a story of the search for economically greener pastures. So, at some point, it boils down to an increased competition to secure scarce natural and economic resources.

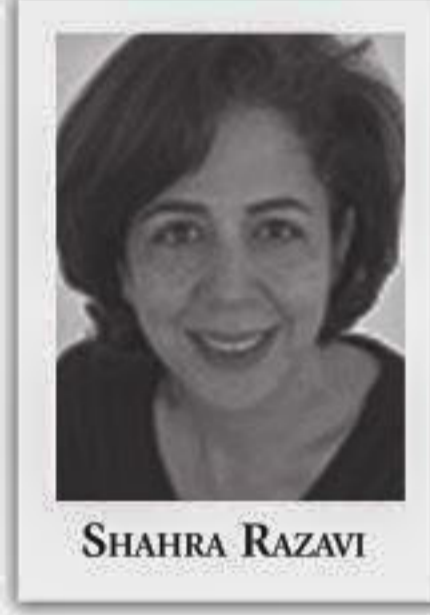
Pallab Bhattacharya is a special correspondent for *The Daily Star*.



People check their names on the final draft of National Register of Citizens (NRC) after it was released in Assam in July, 2018. PHOTO: PTI

PROJECT SYNDICATE

## Social policy starts at home



SHAHRA RAZAVI

**P**OLITICAL economy has come a long way. Many figures and institutions that have long embraced neoliberalism increasingly recognise the failures of

grandparents. About a quarter of all households are either single-parent or single-person.

Moreover, while marriage remains virtually universal in some parts of the world, it is becoming less common in others, with even long-term partners often choosing to cohabit before or instead of getting married. In some countries in Latin America, Southern Africa, and Europe, up to three-quarters of women aged 25-29 who are in relationships are cohabiting with their partners.

All of this has important policy implications. Given their greater longevity, women over 60 are twice as likely as men of the same age group to be living on their own, often subsisting on a meagre pension and/or little, if any, savings.

Furthermore, single-parent households, more than three-quarters of which are headed by single mothers, are on average twice as likely as dual-parent households to be living in poverty. Single parents often struggle to balance paid work with their care responsibilities.

But even in dual-parent and higher-income households, women face significant challenges in juggling paid work and unpaid care work. Globally, women perform over 76 percent of unpaid caregiving, on average—more than three times as much as men.

This significantly reduces women's access to independent income. Only about half of married or cohabiting women aged 25-54 are in the labour force, compared to nearly all married or cohabiting men. And whereas the presence of young children in the household decreases women's

employment rates, it increases that of men.

An independent income strengthens women's bargaining power, enables them to exit abusive relationships, and provides security in old age. Moreover, the share of women earning an independent income is inversely correlated to the share of households in poverty. As the Danish sociologist Gosta Esping-Andersen put it, "The single most effective remedy against poverty is maternal employment."

To enhance women's economic autonomy, the first priority must be to invest in care systems, including early childhood education and care (ECEC). This is particularly urgent in developing countries, where the gap between the supply of childcare services and demand for such services is largest, owing to the relatively small childcare workforce.

Beyond enabling women to pursue economic opportunities, quality, affordable childcare helps to fuel job creation (within the care sector) and build human capital (particularly among the children who benefit from it). Given this, as well as the time commitment that paid work represents for all genders, such investment is needed even if unpaid work is more equally shared within households.

A second key priority must be to deliver comprehensive social protections, including paid leave—which enables parents to care for children without becoming disconnected from the labour market—and income support. Family benefits, such as childcare allowances, mitigate the heightened risk of poverty that accompanies childrearing. Single parents should receive additional support.

Meanwhile, universal pensions can support women—who are likely to have fewer savings and assets than men, but live longer—in old age. The establishment of accessible long-term care services and reform of marital-property regimes would also help. Finally, to protect women's rights to joint assets, social benefits, and child custody, family laws and social policies must recognise cohabitation, rather than just marriage.

By designing a policy package

around the needs of contemporary families, political leaders can promote women's rights, children's development, and employment. The same policies would therefore be a boon to economic dynamism and poverty reduction.

Shahra Razavi is Chief of the Research and Data Section and Research Director of the Progress of the World's Women reports at UN Women.

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Globally, women perform over 76 percent of unpaid caregiving on average, more than three times as much as men.

### ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



**AUGUST 19, 1919**  
**AFGHANISTAN GAINS INDEPENDENCE FROM BRITAIN**

Afghan Victory Day is celebrated on this day to commemorate the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1919 and relinquishment from protected state status. The treaty granted a complete neutral relation between Afghanistan and Britain.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- |               |                     |                        |                                |                    |                     |                  |                  |                       |                   |                  |                    |                 |                  |                    |              |                       |                      |
|---------------|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>ACROSS</b> | 1 Close with a bang | 5 Takes it easy        | 10 Mother of Castor and Pollux | 11 Brings to bear  | 13 Lab aide of film | 14 Clip          | 15 Kind of bliss | 17 Keats poem         | 18 Swanky         | 19 Diner dessert | 20 Make a choice   | 21 Taut         | 22 Lustrous gems | 25 Appliance parts | 26 Audacious | 27 Fellow             | 28 "My country -- of |
|               | 29 Giza sight       | 33 Glentertaining org. | 34 Pizzeria herb               | 35 Most angry      | 37 Test type        | 39 Tooth coating | 39 Script unit   | 40 Sleep sound        | 41 Title paper    |                  |                    |                 |                  |                    |              |                       |                      |
|               | 7 Ready to go       | 8 Highway cop          | 9 Prepared for finals          | 12 Takes the wheel | 16 Lights-out tune  | 21 Apple variety | 22 Slow-witted   | 23 Toxicology samples | 24 Campaign loser | 25 Give a hoot   | 27 Evergreen shrub | 29 Tough puzzle | 30 Madame Curie  | 31 Plain silly     | 32 Meted out | 36 Punk rock offshoot |                      |
| <b>DOWN</b>   | 1 Snail trail       | 2 Court-related        | 3 Find darling                 | 4 Bright flower    | 5 Take back         | 6 Be jubilant    |                  |                       |                   |                  |                    |                 |                  |                    |              |                       |                      |

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS**

L	I	B	E	L	S	F	A	R	E
A	N	E	M	E	L	E	V	E	R
B	A	R	E	L	I	M	E	S	A
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N	E	D	S	A	T	O	N	E	S

### BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



### BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott



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